

UNCLAS ZAGREB 00747

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FM AMEMBASSY ZAGREB
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8007
RUEHUP/AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST 1090

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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AFIN](#) [AMGT](#) [HR](#)
SUBJECT: CROATIA DISASTER DECLARATION

¶1. I am declaring a disaster in Croatia for the loss of property, loss of livelihoods, and actual and potential loss of life caused by heat wave-related wildfires currently raging throughout southern Croatia. I am requesting USD 50,000 for immediate disaster relief from USAID/OFDA. The Government of Croatia (GOC) is doing its best to bring the wildfires under control and protect property and lives, but the extent of the wildfires is unprecedented and GOC resources are not sufficient to adequately respond to this disaster. Croatia is a staunch ally and it is in our interest to provide assistance. The GOC will accept USG assistance. USG disaster relief resources will be used by USAID procurement officials for the immediate local purchase of emergency equipment for the municipalities of Konavle and Zupa Dubrovacka.

¶2. Since July 20, 2007, Croatia has faced severe forest fires, which have been aggravated by extremely high temperatures, winds and dry conditions. Whereas forest fires are a normal occurrence in south-eastern Europe in the summertime, hotter and drier conditions this year have overstretched the regions firefighting capabilities. In July, there were more than 800 separate blazes in Croatia. The situation is particularly bad in the southern province of Dalmatia.

¶3. An emergency situation has been declared in the region of Dubrovnik, a UNESCO world cultural heritage site. The emergency situation continues as more than 500 fire fighters, volunteers and soldiers have been mobilized. Residents of hillside villages surrounding Dubrovnik have fled their homes and fires have been reported to have destroyed houses. The line of fire above the city of Dubrovnik was 12 miles long at one point. Residents are assisting fire fighters by carrying hoses and buckets of water to douse the flames using handkerchiefs and shirts to protect their faces from the thick, overpowering smoke. Unexploded landmines left over from the war in Croatia in the early 1990s are hampering the efforts of fire fighters.

¶4. A large number of civilians suffer from smoke inhalation and there are a number of people seeking emergency assistance. Dubrovnik Mayor Dubravka Suica has imposed a state of emergency and has emergency services on alert to evacuate residents from the hillside districts. Women, children and elderly people have been urged to go to shelters that have been set up. So far, there have been no casualties but several civilians and fire fighters have sustained light injuries, scratches and sprains.

¶5. The fires have damaged woodlands, natural parks, farmlands and currently they are still active on the territory of the following districts: Dubrovnik, Pula, Omis and Virovitica.

¶6. The fires have broken out primarily in regions that are difficult to access, mountainous and which also contain landmines, hindering the ability to fight the fires.

¶7. The Prime Minister of Croatia has requested that assistance be targeted to the municipalities with the most urgent needs - Konavle and Zupa Dubrovacka - in the region of Dubrovnik. These

municipalities have an insufficient protective gear and fire fighting equipment causing a critical situation that is life threatening for the fire fighters and citizens in the region of Dalmatia.

18. The municipalities are requesting specific protective gear and fire fighting equipment that can be purchased locally.

19. USAID Croatia is in the position to efficiently and quickly provide the requested assistance in the current situation.

BRADTKE